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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the instructor selection process for a television course in health education for undergraduate students. Since presenter selection may be critical for instructional effectiveness, the selection process was designed to utilize objective data to predict the presenter's impact on the intended audience. Audience appeal or ability to hold the interest of the learner was measured by student and staff reactions to 3-1/2 minute video taped presentations. Differences between student and staff preferences emphasized the importance of employing representatives of the target audience in the selection/rating process. (STS)

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THE ASSESSMENT AND SELECTION OF ITV PRESENTERS: BEYOND THE INTUITIVE APPROACH

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THE ASSESSMENT AND SELECTION OF ITV PRESENTERS: BEYOND THE INTUITIVE APPROACH

INTRODUCTION

One of the essential but often neglected determinants of effective instructional television is the attributes of the presenter as perceived by the learner. Brown, in his discussion of studies conducted in developing the S-U-N project, concludes that the selection of an ITV presenter should be seen as critical to the success or failure of the production (Brown, Brown and Danielson, 1975, p. 403).

The development of a systematic formative evaluation design for selection and assessment of an ITV presenter can address this issue in a scientific manner and result in several principle benefits. First, such an approach goes beyond the intuition of professional staff members in helping to insure the final success of a televised course of study. The decision-making process with regard to selecting the ITV presenter must be founded on objective data designed to accurately predict the presenter's impact on the intended audience. Secondly, the use of a systematic, data-based approach will assist in avoiding the many "political" pitfalls which so often become a part of less objective procedures. Thirdly, the use of a rigorous presenter assessment process in the initial stages of course development increases efficiency by eliminating costly revisions at later stages. Lastly, a carefully planned process can be used both for the selection of an effective ITV presenter and, with some refinements, as a diagnostic tool for assessing and training presenters once they have been selected.

The evaluation process described below was part of an overall instructional development model formulated to design a televised course in health education.* Two sections of this model appear in the appendix. The purpose of the course was to provide instruction to undergraduate students at Michigan State University on how to be an effective health care consumer and included actual behavioral change techniques directed at smoking, diet, exercise, etc.

After some deliberation, it was decided that rather than enlist a faculty member to present the course, a presenter would be selected from a field of professional acting, television or radio talent. This decision was based on the assumption that the presenter could then be selected on the basis of specific criteria, thus providing the opportunity for selecting only the most qualified individual. It was also felt that professional talent might be more comfortable with the extensive direction required by the planned course format and be better able to meet the time schedule demands of the project. Had a decision been reached to make use of a faculty presenter, the same process would have been modified to create a diagnostic procedure for assessment and training purposes.

The function of the presenter was to deliver selected content information and to introduce, interpret, summarize and provide transitions for various instructional sequences and presentations by content experts. It was therefore required that the presenter selected possess a variety of different skills.

The procedures developed for choosing the presenter concentrated on the measurement of appeal, which, along with effectiveness, make up the basic qualities

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*The instructional development procedures for this course were designed by the staff of the Office of Health Services Education and Research with the assistance of the MSU Instructional Television Service, Learning and Evaluation Service, the Biomedical Communications Center, and the Learning Resources Center.

assessed in the evaluation of instruction. Effectiveness can be defined as the impact of instruction with respect to the cognitive, affective and behavioral changes taking place in the learner. This is the prime determinant of quality in instruction . Appeal, which can be defined as the extent to which the instructional presentation holds the interest of the learner, is seen as a contributor to overall effectiveness. The relationship between appeal and effectiveness is not entirely clear. Appeal is, however, often recognized as a significant ingredient which must be considered in the development of sound instructional material. Children's Television Workshop, for instance, a pioneer in systematic data-based instructional design, concentrated considerable effort on the measurement of appeal, feeling that it relates directly to comprehension and is more than just learner whim or prejudice (Palmer, 1974). Other research findings on the relationship between appeal and effectiveness are reported in Hall (1970); Brown, Brown and Danielson (1975); Younge and Sassenrath (1968); and Brown, Covert, Craig and Snodgrass (1974).

It was felt that appeal was especially crucial to the attainment of the objectives of this health education course, which were intended to affect substantial attitudinal and behavioral changes. The controversial nature of the material to be presented, the expected negative predisposition of the students toward health education, and the difficulties encountered in past efforts by others at influencing well-ingrained life-style characteristics (i.e., smoking, reaction to illness, etc.) all make appeal very important in designing instructional materials for this area.

The assessment of presenter effectiveness would have required that the students' cognitive skill gains be compared for each of the presenter candidates assessed. That is, the students would be given a test of their

comprehension of the material presented by the candidates, and the students' scores would be compared to determine the most effective presenter. This was not carried out because of methodological problems that would have required substantial expenditures of time and resources to solve.

PROCEDURES

Initial Screening

To obtain candidates for the presenter position, names of local individuals with acting or television experience were acquired from Michigan State University's theatre department, local theatre companies, and the production staff of the Instructional Television Service. These individuals were then contacted and told about the course and the presenter roles and asked if they were interested and could make the kind of time commitment necessary. Those who responded were briefed by the ITV production staff and the OHSER instructional development staff as to the details of the selection procedure and asked to submit a resume of their professional experiences.

After reviewing the background information on the potential candidates, 19 individuals (9 men and 10 women) were selected for the initial screen testing process. Screen test scripts were sent to each of the participants several days before they were to appear at the studio. On the day of the test, the candidates were provided with detailed stage directions. They taped a 3-1/2 minute presentation on a health-related topic, using a teleprompter if they wished. They were told that the segment would be taped twice, and the best of the two would be selected for the test. The tapes were then reviewed by students representing a cross-section of the anticipated target audience using an instrument especially designed to measure appeal characteristics of the individual candidates. The tapes were then reviewed by expert consultants and staff.

Instrument Design

The measurement of appeal used focused on an overall rating of the candidates on personality-type qualities. It was felt that it was important in initially choosing a presenter to elicit the reviewers' impressions of the candidates' general ability to create interest and empathy with the target audience. In adapting this procedure for diagnostic purposes and training, the reviewers' ratings would be based on more specific behaviors, i.e., speaking rate, posture, gestures, fluency, etc., which are more modifiable than basic overall impressions of appeal (Sherman and Blackburn, 1975).

The characteristics on which the reviewers rated the candidates were selected on the basis of current research results. Brown, Brown and Danielson (1975, p. 402) give the following characteristics as those most likely to be found in a successful presenter. He/she should appear: intrinsically interested in the subject matter and eager to share it, friendly, self-assured, confident, and credible. They suggest that it is better to appear over-enthusiastic than to be neutral and non-commital. Lundeen (1972, p. 16ff) mentions the need for an interest in and appreciation for the subject matter, while Dudek (1972) gives motivation, vitality and confidence as significant presenter characteristics. Sherman and Blackburn (1975, p. 126) found four factors that were related to overall faculty effectiveness as perceived by students. These factors included personal potency (bold, energetic), pragmatism (practical, predictable), amicability (sensitive, open-minded), and intellectual competency (expert, wise). Dubin and Headley (1969, p. 44ff) note that in two surveys of faculty on criteria used for the selection of instructional television teachers (Los Angeles City School Districts, 1958; Timmons and Fey, 1964), personal characteristics make up half of the criteria listed, the

rest being various components of knowledge of the field, teaching ability and experience. Some of the personal characteristics listed as important were adaptability, warmth, sincerity, dynamic, poised and "telegenic appearance".

The format for the instrument was guided by several different sources. Texts of survey research and marketing were consulted, as well as procedures used by the Children's Television Workshop. A preliminary version of the instrument was designed and then submitted to the MSU ITV staff and other faculty experts in the field in instructional design and their comments noted for necessary revisions. The resulting instrument was then pre-tested in three different sessions with different samples of students in an attempt to further refine the form, instructions and testing procedures.

The final version of the instrument presented a series of seven-point semantic differential items with a negative characteristic on one side of the scale and a positive one on the other. The position of the positive and negative characteristics were reversed on several items to avoid a bias toward marking one side of the scale only. The positive characteristics were: "friendly, seems interested in topic, self-confident, sincere, speaks clearly, believable, competent, enthusiastic, intelligent, attractive, could talk to informally, self-assured, and professional". The negative characteristics were the opposite of each of these. A copy of the scale is in the appendix .

Review Procedures

While both the professionals and students reviewed the screen test tapes, the review procedure used with the students was a more structured activity. Participating students were selected from a pool of students who are used for many research projects on campus. The pool is designed to be representative of all undergraduate students at the University.

The procedures for the student review sessions were adapted from recommendations offered in Yelon (1974). The students were informed about the purpose of the course and the role of the presenter they were helping to select. Students were then given specific directions as to how the review would be conducted. They would watch a short tape segment of each of six or seven presenter candidates, each presenting the same material. They would then be asked to rate each of the candidates on a one-page rating form and, finally, to select two out of the six that they liked best overall.

Three review sessions were scheduled for the initial screening test so that no group of students would have to watch more than one hour of tape. Instructions and procedures were carefully standardized for each session. The tapes of candidates were randomly divided into three separate groups. One group reviewed seven tapes and the other two reviewed six each.

Review Analysis

Results from the review sessions were scored as follows. For each student, the ratings of the characteristics for each candidate were summed and then averaged across all students rating that candidate. The mean and standard deviation of the ratings were computed for each candidate. The 19 candidates were then ranked by these mean scores. They were also ranked by the number of first and second place votes they received.

The students were provided with space to make open-ended comments on the rating form and this information, as well as information gathered in a debriefing at the end of the review session, were recorded. This additional information was used to assist in interpreting the numerical scores from the rating scale.

Following the review sessions for the initial screen test, a meeting was held involving principle staff and consultants concerned with the development of the course. Findings from the student and professional reviews were presented and discussed.

The procedures succeeded in discriminating between candidates, thus demonstrating their utility. The mean scores on the student ratings of the candidates ranged from 76.69 to 49.89. When the student review results were compared with the professional review results, it was discovered that a wide divergence of opinion existed between the two groups as to the appeal of the presenter candidates. This is significant in that it appears to substantiate the necessity of basing production decisions on data from the intended audience.

Secondary Screening

The secondary test was designed to bring out the candidate's ability to handle situations other than a straight presentation using a teleprompter, such as was used in the initial screening. It also provided the candidates with a further opportunity to demonstrate aspects of their on-camera personality, and their ability to "think on their feet", improvise lines, and handle stressful, unpredictable on-camera situations.

Three females and three males were chosen for the secondary screening, as it had been decided to use a male-female team to perform the presenter role. The candidates who received the highest ratings from both the professionals and the students were chosen. The students' top ranked candidates made up the balance of the six selected.

A frequent activity in the course modules will be interviews conducted by the presenters with various medical content experts who might often be

difficult interview subjects. This procedure was therefore seen as a direct test of an ability needed for the course presenters and one that would be difficult to train a candidate in at a later date. A member of the College of Human Medicine staff with media and acting experience, of imposing and distinguished appearance, was asked to be the interviewee. He was instructed to respond in as close to the same manner as possible to all six candidates to insure that there would be as little order bias as possible. That is, we wanted to insure that, for instance, the candidates who conducted the later interviews would not have an easier time than those who taped the earlier interviews because of the growing familiarity of the interviewee with the situation.

The interviewee decided to play the role of a large metropolitan hospital labor relations administrator. The candidates were given a short fact sheet about the man and his role and were allowed a half-hour to plan their approach to the five-minute interview. The interviewee planned several tactics that he used with each candidate to test the candidate's interviewing skill. For one section of the interview, he answered all queries with "yup" or "nope" only. At another point, he launched into a long, rambling discourse on the history of the hospital and continued until the candidate stopped him. In a third segment, he answered a fairly straight-forward question with "I haven't any idea what you're talking about."

The students viewing this second group of tests were obtained through the same procedures, though with only six tapes only one group of students was needed. The same instrument was used for the review, with the addition of three items. The positive poles of these items were: "In control of the interview," "Shows rapport with the guest," and "I learned a lot about this topic."

The staff and course consultants were then asked to rate the tapes. The interviewee was interviewed following each taping session and asked how he felt about the performance of each of the candidates. The results from the secondary screening were even more definite than the initial test results, with the top male and female being rated and ranked far ahead of the other candidates. The value of the secondary screening was pointed up by the fact that several candidates who had performed well on the initial screening had difficulties with the interview process.

CONCLUSIONS

There are several major conclusions that can be derived from this project. The systematic data-based selection and assessment of presenters for ITV instruction was validated by the results obtained. The procedures developed worked smoothly and elicited strong feelings from the students that clearly showed their preferences in presenters.

The discrepancies between the student and staff ratings in the initial review procedure demonstrate clearly that the opinions of professional staff cannot be used to predict student opinions. The student ratings were completely unanticipated by all the staff members, even those who were most confident that they had sufficient empathy with students to be able to predict their preferences. That this was not the case underscores the need, throughout the various stages of the instructional development process, for careful consideration of the target audience, and for the use of objective data, rather than intuition, for assessing student needs, attitudes, etc.

The availability of data from the target audience also helped to avoid common problems associated with this type of production decision. Staff members

had difficulty avoiding inserting their subjective feelings about the candidates, many of whom were known to the staff. The data-based decision-making helped avoid some potentially difficult personal and political situations. It should be added, however, that staff members did not universally accept decision-making based on anything but their own professionally trained opinions. The staff of the Children's Television Workshop discuss at length the delicate process involved in using evaluation data to affect production decisions (Palmer, 1974, p. 326).

The use of a process such as that described in this paper can also increase the cost-efficiency of the production by avoiding the need for costly revisions after production has begun. If serious problems regarding student empathy with the presenter existed, it would be best to discover them before the majority of lessons had been taped.

The use of two types of screening procedures was found to be very important for the assessment of the candidates. Several candidates who performed very well in the straight presentational format with the teleprompter were not able to perform in an interview situation. These seem to be discrete abilities, both of which are required by a presenter, and both of which therefore need to be assessed.

Another conclusion of the project is that the basic techniques presented here have utility beyond the choice of presenters. The assessment of the presenter's performance during the taping of the instructional units can also be carried out through this type of review process. The rating scale would include such items as speaking rate, posture, gestures, facial expression, modulation of voice tone, etc., rather than personality-type characteristics. It is in the consideration of these more specific behaviors that the input of professional staff

can be of significant value. These findings would then be used for training the presenter and for developing the most appropriate style of presentation for different types of material.

Furthermore, the techniques developed here can be used to supply data for other production decisions. Many aspects of instructional development process used for this course are based on the use of data from systematic student review. The effectiveness, as well as the appeal, of the instructional materials is tested by having groups of students review pilot versions of the material. The appeal of various sections of the materials is measured by the use of a rating instrument similar to the one used for the presenter ratings. Revisions of the materials are made as needed on the basis of the results, and the new materials retested. This process results in a product of known and optimal appeal.

The production of quality instructional television requires an extensive commitment of time and resources. Only by the application of systematic and rigorous planning, development and evaluation procedures can the difficulties involved with creating an effective experience be surmounted. The selection of the ITV presenter role, while representing only one aspect of this involved process, must be seen as critical to the impact of the final product. Without sufficient effort aimed at selecting the best personnel available, all other efforts toward insuring a successful outcome may well be impaired.

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